

Palm-germ.

for math



## TRIENNIAL SERMON,

*Before the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity constituting the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the United States of America, preached in Christ Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, on Thursday Evening, October 3, 1850. By the Rt. Rev. J. H. Hopkins, D. D., Bishop of Vermont.*

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PSALMS, CXXXIII.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Heaven, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Beautiful and impressive, my brethren, at all times, to the feelings of the Christian heart, are the words of the divine Psalm, which I have selected for our edification on this occasion. And the Church has wisely ordered that they shall be familiar words, as they are appointed to be a constantly recurring part of her stated and solemn services. Assuredly they have lost none of their force in these days of strife and opposition. Nor can we offer to the throne of Grace a more needful or acceptable supplication than that the spirit which they indicate may be vouchsafed, in rich abundance, to our souls; to animate our counsels with the warmth of kindly affection, and strengthen within us and around us the communion of that glorious Church, which is the kingdom, not only of heavenly truth, but of love, and peace, and unity.

A few brief remarks on the practical doctrine of the text will first be presented to your attention, and then I shall proceed to consider their application to the present position and future prospects of the missionary enterprise, in the humble trust that I may be enabled to speak, and you to hear, under the influence of the Spirit who dictated them.

1. "Behold," saith the inspired Psalmist, "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" The word with which this passage commences is peculiarly expressive and emphatic. It may even be considered imperative, involving the force of a precept: as if our Almighty Father commanded his children to regard this thing with especial observation. "Behold!" because it is your duty to contemplate it. "Behold!" because it is your highest interest to understand it. "Behold!" because you have only to look and it must be manifest to all: "How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." It is good for the cause of God and for the welfare of man—good for the honor and progress of that Gospel which is the religion of love—good for the growth of our own grace, and for the example and benefit of others—good in the sight of the Lord, and of the saints, and of the glorious hierarchy of heaven—good, even in the judgment of the world, since the ungodly are never so impressed by the power of faith as when they are compelled to say, "Behold, how these Christians love one another."

Not only, however, is it good for brethren to dwell together in unity, it is pleasant also. Yea, there is no pleasantness on earth to be compared with the spirit of fraternal unity, as there is no affliction on earth so painful as the strife of fraternal discord. How pleasant to move amongst our fellows with the open brow, the cordial greeting, the loving smile of genuine confidence—to know that even when our judgments may differ, our hearts are one—to be assured that below the surface of our intercourse there is no secret root of bitterness—that our character is safe in their keeping—that our motives are respected, our failings and infirmities regarded with charitable allowance, our better qualities dwelt on with real complacency, our successes beheld with joy, our calamities with sympathizing sorrow! How pleasant to escape from the stormy atmosphere of a censorious and suspicious world, into the quiet sunshine of spiritual affection; and to feel that while jealousy and envy, and all the forms and shapes of unhallowed selfishness are warring around us, we can always find a calm and peaceful refuge in the Church of God!

2. But the inspired Psalmist passes on from the announcement of the proposition, to illustrate it by a lively comparison with the unction of the Levitical priesthood. The spirit of brotherly unity he declares to be “like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.” It may be well to consider some of the more obvious points of this sacred similitude.

I would first observe then, that the holy anointing oil was an appointed sign of the highest spiritual consecration. And so the fraternal unity of the Church is an appointed sign of that spiritual consecration, which makes us the children of our heavenly Father. “By this we know that we are born of God,” saith St. John, “because we love the brethren. And of this brotherly love, brotherly unity is the outward expression.

2. It may be remarked, secondly, that the precious ointment was poured upon the head of Aaron, as a symbol of the grace which sanctifies the whole region of the thoughts, motives, aims, and objects of the regenerated understanding. And here it bore a lively resemblance to that brotherly union, which manifests the sanctification of the Christian’s intellect when he is renewed in the spirit of his mind; no longer tied down to the narrow circle of selfishness, but occupied for the whole Church—thinking, planning, laboring, watching, praying for all the brethren, as one who is indeed anointed by the Holy Ghost, and who carries about with him the constant remembrance of his heavenly fellowship.

3. In the third place we find the anointing oil poured upon the head of Aaron in such abundance that it ran down upon his beard, and even to the skirts of his garments. How expressive a symbol of fraternal unity in its diffusive influence! For here we are reminded that the odor of Aaron’s consecration was not confined to his forehead. It lay not shut up under his sacred mitre, but descended to his lips and gave fragrance to his words, and exhaled from the flowing locks which rested on his bosom, and even perfumed his sacred clothing, surrounded his whole person with an atmosphere of sweetness, of which all who approached him were at once made sensible. And does not the spirit of brotherly love, in like manner, diffuse its blessed sympathy? Does it not descend from the mind of the Christian to the lips, giving them the law of kindness? Does it not breathe from the heart and mingle a celestial fragrance with the language? Does it not go down, as it were, to the skirts of the garments, so that the whole man seems invested with a gracious influence, and impresses all who come near to him with a sense of his superior privileges, as a priest and king to God and the Father?

3. As if the Holy Spirit, however, was mercifully solicitous to mark yet more forcibly the importance of fraternal unity, he varies the illustration to another form. It is “as the dew of Hermon,” saith the Psalmist, “and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

The fruitful hill of Hermon, and the lofty mountains of Zion, are currently used in Scripture, as acknowledged symbols of the Church of God. But de-

prive them of the dew of heaven, and what would become of their fertility? The tender grass, the bright and fragrant flowers, the fruitful vine and olive, the lofty cedars of Lebanon, would all wither and die, if they were not nourished by the gentle and kindly moisture, which is essential to the very sap of life. Hence, when the Lord appointed the discipline of chastisement for His rebellious people, we see that it often consisted in the withholding of this indispensable blessing. The decree went forth, at one time especially, that there should not be dew nor rain for years together. Alas! what a period of suffering was the result of that infliction. The land of promise was theirs, the hill of Hermon remained, and the mountains of Zion; but the labors of the husbandman were blasted with drought. The fields were ploughed and sown, but the seed perished. The feast of the first fruits came, but there was no product with which to make the offering. The vintage arrived, but there was no grapes to gather. The song of the harvest-home was turned to sighs and tears. The joy of abundance was changed into the fearful pangs of famine. O, how expressive an image of the condition of the Church, when the blessing of brotherly unity has departed! There are still the lofty land-marks of her faith and doctrines. There are still the orders of her ministry. There are still the regular labors of her yearly course. There are still the fixed rotation of fasts and festivals. But if brotherly love be wanting—if the dew of that heavenly grace be withheld, where is that harvest of souls to reward the spiritual husbandman?

And yet the Psalmist plainly insists that on the hill of Hermon and the mountains of Zion, "the Lord had commanded the blessing, even life evermore." It was not because He had ceased to be gracious, but because His people had ceased to be faithful to His laws, that the dew was withheld, and the blessing suspended. "A fruitful land maketh He barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." And precisely on the same principle does He deal with his Church, his spiritual Zion. There he has promised to be, to the end of the world. "There he has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." But as "the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion," was the appointed instrument of blessing and life to the land of Israel, so the unanimity of Christian love is the appointed instrument of blessing and life to the Church of God, Love is the life of faith. First, Love to Him, who first loved us:—"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," saith St. Paul, "let him be anathema, maranatha." And next, Love to the brethren: "As Christ loved us," saith St. John, "we ought also to love one another." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And unity in this spirit of brotherly love is, therefore, one essential branch of the unity which Christ designed for His people. True indeed it is that we are required to follow unity in many other respects. Unity of faith, unity of system, unity of form, unity of government, unity of interest, all have their appropriate place, and all possess a certain value in the Church of God. But without the unity of Christian love, none of them can be truly acceptable to our heavenly Father. It is this above all which is good and pleasant to the Christian heart. It is on this above all that the Lord has commanded his blessing, even life evermore.

And hence, as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, was withheld in just chastisement for the rebellion of Israel, even so, when the grace of brotherly love is withdrawn from the Church, it must be in punishment for our sins. The apostle had no hesitation in declaring to the Corinthians that they were carnal, and walked as ordinary men, when he saw that there were divisions, and strifes, and envyings, and jealousies, amongst them; and therefore he enforced upon them so powerfully the grace of brotherly love, calling it the "more excellent way." The same causes still produce the same effects, when Christians walk as other men, in worldliness and sensuality, strifes and contentions increase, charity diminishes, fraternal affection grows cold, even those who once took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends, become estranged and embittered, until the spirit of unity and love is grieved away, and peace is forgotten, in angry controversy, and the Church becomes distracted by a civil war, raging in her very bosom.



2. Enough, however, has been said, upon the general interpretation of the Psalmist's language, and I would next proceed to state the mode in which it may be applied. And here, my beloved brethren, I trust that you will suffer the word of faithful and kindly exhortation.

It would be equally vain and foolish to deny that our highly favored branch of the holy Catholic Church has a standard of unity, which is drawn directly from the fountain of inspiration, transmitted through the sacred channel of apostolic truth and order, and guarded on every side by the strong and powerful bulwarks of pure and primitive doctrine. On all the great and essential points of faith, worship, and discipline, we are as completely one, as the Church has ever been, or as, in the nature of things, the Church can ever hope to be, in this her militant state of comparative imperfection. But this admirable and sublime standard does not exclude a variety of opinions, interpretations, and disputes, on lesser points, in which we differ. And the difference in these leads to the existence of schools, or parties, whose strifes are all liable to the danger of exaggeration and interference, when the bond of substantial unity is forgotten, and brotherly love is sacrificed on the false altar of supposed truth, and a bigotted attachment to our own favorite class of notions assumes the highest place amongst the virtues of religion.

It is in this tendency to party spirit, that we are to look for the peril of the Church's unity. On a former occasion,\* I endeavored to prove that the existence of parties was unavoidable, and that it was even useful, provided the spirit of party was kept down, by the watchful tenderness of brotherly affection, and the high standard of essential truth and order was not confounded with the narrow views of sectarian temper, which is, of all things, the most hostile to genuine Catholicity. And although I may well doubt whether my humble effort was then acceptable, and may now fear that my application of the principle will prove to be no better than a beating of the air, yet I cannot in candor abstain from the attempt to impress upon my respected auditors, the importance of magnifying our bond of concord, and setting as light an estimate as possible upon our arguments of strife, in obedience to the divine declaration, "Behold how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

But it may be asked, how shall men walk together, unless they be agreed? I answer, that it is indeed necessary for Christian unity to be agreed, and yet it is not necessary that this should extend to *all* points of religious opinion, so long as they are agreed in the *main* and *essential* points of established faith and order.

Again it may be asked, what is to be done if they do not concur in these? I answer that the difference cannot be great, amongst those who are willing to abide by the same authoritative standards. If any are found to have departed from those standards, whether in faith or morals, the Church has provided a sufficient tribunal of judgment and discipline. And it is our duty to appeal to that tribunal in every flagrant case, and to acquiesce quietly and peaceably in its decision; since otherwise, unity becomes impossible, and discipline is dishonored, and the very mode which is established to put an end to controversy, is converted into an apology for making it more mischievous than before, when the spirit of judgment is resisted by the spirit of party, and a factious opposition lords it over the Church of God.

And here lies the inherent danger of all party combinations, namely, in their tendency to exaggerate their own peculiar notions into a factitious importance, to introduce another standard of interpretation for the purpose of controlling the more enlarged and comprehensive standards of the Church, and then to regard themselves as the only portion which is faithful, and to say to all who refuse to join them, "Stand by, for we are holier than thou." The extreme difficulty of guarding against this party spirit, which is so apt to run after a while into a species of bitter fanaticism, forms the strongest argument against party organization. For nothing is so fatal to that fraternal love, without which it is impossible for brethren to dwell together in unity. And yet I doubt not that

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parties will always exist, as they have always existed. Neither do I doubt that they are lawful, so long as their avowed purpose is to defend and sustain the truth, as the Church has received it. Nor do I question that they are useful, provided they can be maintained with candor, with fairness, and with charity. But to preserve a party, without the stimulus of a mischievous party spirit—to keep up a wholesome antagonism to error, without departing from the laws of unity and love—this I believe is one of the rarest achievements of Christian wisdom and watchfulness. And therefore it is that I have for myself endeavored to keep aloof from all party associations, because I doubted my own prudence and strength, and feared to expose my weakness to the temptation of exclusiveness, and desired to cherish, as far as possible, that fraternal affection towards all my brethren, which I knew to be the best preservative of the Church's unity, and felt to be the safest frame for my own soul.

I trust, my brethren, that you will pardon this expression of egotism, which is offered in the spirit of apology, not only for myself, but for such others as may have adopted, on principle, a course exposed to a very common misconception. And as it comes fairly within the range of my subject, I shall proceed to show the reasons why I regard our present party differences as not involving any serious obstacle to the cordial exercise of that fraternal confidence and unity, in which alone the great work of the Church, whether in the missionary department or any other, can be accomplished with the hope of the divine blessing.

What then, considered in the spirit of candor and of kindness, is the amount of these differences? Let us see whether they can be presented with fairness and brevity. And here you will not understand me as speaking of the extravagances put forth by extreme and *ultra* men of our clergy, but of the sentiments entertained by the great body.

1. Some of our brethren have a higher reverence than others for the visible Church, and look with a far deeper respect to the voice of ecclesiastical tradition. But all agree in their professed allegiance to our own standards, where the ancient creeds, and liturgy, and offices, with the admirable commentary of the Articles and the Homilies, afford an ample range of established doctrine. What is there to prevent the unity of brotherly affection, in a case like this?

2. Some have a deeper feeling and a more stringent theory than others with respect to the sacraments. But all agree in holding that they are generally necessary to salvation, and only profit the worthy receiver. All adopt the definitions of the Church. All abjure transubstantiation, and the *opus operatum* maxim of the Papal system. Surely there is a sufficient basis here for fraternal unity.

3. Some have a loftier idea of the priestly office and the episcopal government than others entertain. But all agree in referring their practical exercise to the same canonical rules, and the same established custom. Why, then, should churchmen, on either side, sacrifice their mutual regards in disputing about the extent of powers which, as all admit, can never be exercised beyond the fixed lines of law and order?

4. Some have a stronger sense than others of the importance of good works in the economy of salvation. But all agree in the statements of the Articles, that justification is by faith only, and that this justifying faith is known by its works, as truly as the tree is known by its fruit, since faith without works is dead and wholly unprofitable. Now where is the real necessity for unkind suspicions, and accusations of Romanism and heresy, in a controversy about this branch of Christian doctrine?

5. Some look upon the Church of Rome with a more friendly feeling than they exercise towards Puritanism, and others regard Puritanism with considerable favor, and Rome with strong abhorrence. But all agree substantially in the plain protest against Roman errors, contained in the Articles and Homilies; and all profess their fervent attachment to our apostolic ministry, our liturgy, and government, the whole of which is irreconcilable with Puritanism. No churchman, however, in our country, can be really in a position to understand thoroughly the practical working of the Romish system; and therefore his disposition to regard it with any indulgence must be formed mainly in a fanciful

or theoretical view, based on the specious display of external pomp, or the sophistry of its artful and unscrupulous advocates. The peculiarities of Puritanism, on the contrary, are obvious, and we have yet to see the first instance of an educated churchman deliberately choosing to leave his own communion for the sake of adopting them. Why, then, should a variance of opinion on the comparative merits of Popery and Independency, which, for the most part, can be hardly any thing more than a speculative abstraction, disturb our fraternal unity of feeling?

6. Another subject of reproach is found by some in the symbolism of church architecture, to which a portion of our brethren, of late, attach remarkable importance. But if my neighbor chooses to erect even an ordinary dwelling house, with a special reference to the facts of history or the maxims of moral truth, although I might not always admire the application of his theory, yet I should hardly think it consistent with Christian charity to ridicule him, only because he seeks to invest a matter of taste with a higher meaning. The effort to give a signification to architecture, however, is far more worthy of respect, when it is connected with the house of God. We know the expressive symbolism of the holy tabernacle in the wilderness, and of the subsequent temple at Jerusalem. It was not beneath the majesty of the Almighty to show the pattern of these sacred structures to Moses and Solomon. Why, then, should we blame the reverent solicitude of our brethren in the construction of their churches, to invest them, as far as taste and picty can go, with the meaning appropriate to their consecrated character. Only let that meaning be in accordance with truth, and clear of mediæval superstition, and I can see no reason why it may not be expressed in symbols as well as in words, and be recorded in wood, and stone, and glass, and ornament, as well as in any other vehicle. Surely, then, in a matter like this, although all may not think alike with regard to its expediency, yet no impartial mind can discern the slightest ground for unkindness or suspicion.

And yet it is notorious to us all, that the discordant opinions entertained on these various subjects are the stimulants of party spirit, and divide us into bands as strongly marked as the ranks of politicians. We forget the glorious system of the Church in which we are agreed, and talk mainly of the comparative trifles in which we differ. We break the divine law of brotherly love, and make a law of strife out of our own notions to justify the violation. We place our private judgment above the judgment of the Church, and create another standard out of that which she has left indifferent. We condemn each other for things which our Master has not condemned. Full often we turn against ourselves the weapons which should be zealously directed against the world, the flesh, and the devil. In all our great assemblies there is seldom a question to be decided, in which the spirit of party does not mingle its distorting influence. And it is still as it was in the days of Job, that when the sons of God come up to worship before the Lord, Satan comes also amongst them.

My beloved brethren, it is not because I desire to wound the feelings of a single individual that I use this plainness of speech. But I stand not here in the presence of the searcher of hearts, and in the great congregation of His people, to trifle with the difficulties which surround us. Our lot is cast in a period of extraordinary agitation. The spirit of the age is emphatically the spirit of dissension; and it can only be resisted by that Holy Spirit of fraternal unity and love, in whose strength we may lift up the banner of the cross, with the promise of victory.

Fifteen years have passed away since the Church beheld the apparent annihilation of party spirit in your great missionary organization. Then, for a while, there was an exulting joy in the union of discordant elements. Then, for a while, we seemed to realize the meaning of the Psalmist: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" But, alas! the reign of internal peace was brief and transitory. The adversary devised a subtler scheme than ever, and the old spirit of discord revived, in a new form, more potent and beguiling than before. The result has been that the missions of the Church have labored for a considerable time under the heavy disadvanta-



ges of discord and suspicion. And at the present moment there are many who see no remedy for the existing evil, except in an abandonment of the Constitution and a separate organization according to party lines, in which the zeal of each may operate, without check or hindrance, in its own way.

For myself, brethren, I am bound to say, in candor, that I have no share either in the credit or responsibility of our present Constitution. I confess that I had no faith at the time in the apparent fusion of parties. I doubted the policy of attempting a kind of organization which was perfectly new in the history of the Church, and believed that the end could be accomplished far more safely in the form of a voluntary society, which the experience of others had fully tested. I voted, accordingly, in the negative, along with a small minority. Nor have I since any reason to question the correctness of my position.

I am aware, therefore, that I may be exposed to the charge of inconsistency, when I avow that I am now perfectly ready to adhere to our existing system, although it was not the system of my choice, nor would it be at present, if it were a new question. But the aspect of the matter is entirely changed, in my judgment, by the controlling necessity which I see for unity. The Church, for fifteen years, has sustained the plan, under heavy difficulties; and I would deprecate, under existing circumstances, any movement in favor of change. This is no time to make sacrifices to party spirit, or to weaken a single fibre of the bonds which hold us together. This is no time even to seem to falter, as if the institutions of the Church were failing through internal strife. In union, under God, is our strength. In union is our hope. In union is our confidence. Once solemnly committed to the work of missions, as a duty of the whole united Church, it would be an open sign of discord if it were now abandoned to party organizations. And therefore, I, for one, cheerfully sacrifice my individual preference to the paramount interests of that fraternal union, which ought to be regarded, in due obedience to Christian truth, as at once our highest privilege and our holiest obligation.

In humble and grateful dependence, therefore, on the Spirit of Christ, let us seek for and cherish, my beloved brethren, this affectionate unity, which our subtle adversary is so active to destroy. Let us preach the Gospel in plain simplicity, insisting on its high spiritual principles, and laying no ground for alarm or uneasiness by any novelties in doctrine or worship. Let us think and speak of the great truths in which we all agree, rather than of the minor opinions in which we differ. Let us show our devotion to the Saviour, and our love to His Church, by strict fidelity to our system of faith and our rules of order, and seek for the things that make for peace, and shew, in all our conduct, a charitable regard for the conscience, the character, and the feelings of each other. Let us avoid censorious remarks and unkind suspicions on trifling grounds, and take especial heed that our liberty become not a stumbling block to our fellow disciples. And above all, let us look to the throne of grace in constant watchfulness and fervent prayer, that the Lord, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, may preserve us from the ultraism of party spirit, guide us in the way of truth and love, and unite us more and more heartily with himself and with our brethren.

In all this, however, you may say, my brethren, that there is nothing peculiar to the work of missions; and it may be that I have disappointed your reasonable expectations in presenting you with a discourse which is so little adapted to the special subject of our meeting. My apology is this, that I believe the great department of missionary zeal to be only a particular direction of the Gospel to the wants of the destitute at home and the heathen abroad, of which you are perfectly aware. That on the importance of Missions, and the duty of sustaining them, there is but one opinion—and that if I could do aught to aid the cause, it would not be by repeating the ordinary topics, with which my respected hearers are all familiar, so much as by the enforcement of those duties which are vitally important, not only to the prosperity of missions, but to every other portion of our ministerial field.

With this view, I have endeavored, at least with frank sincerity, to indicate

the course which is sanctioned alike by the Scriptures and the Church ; confident that if, through divine grace, we be enabled to pursue it, we may humbly trust that our Missionary work will advance with a new impulse of energy, and go on with increasing devotion and success.

Our conventional intercourse will be hallowed by the wisdom from above, and endeared by the cordial kindness of Christian affection. The gloomy shadows of the past will be forgotten in the sunshine of peace and hope. We shall see "Jerusalem in prosperity all our days," and be able to repeat, in the full glow of our own grateful experience, the beautiful language of the Psalmist, which I have taken for my theme :

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments: as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord promised his blessing, even life for evermore."



